

REMARKS

Claims 1-16 presently are pending in the application.

The Examiner has kindly acknowledged the claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119, as well as receipt of the certified copies of the priority documents.

The Examiner has also enclosed an initialed copy of the Form PTO-1449 thereby indicating that he has considered the reference filed together with the application on April 2, 2001.

The Examiner acknowledges Applicant's election without traverse of Group I in the response filed October 29, 2002. The Examiner indicates that upon further consideration, claims 2 and 4 are also considered to be readable on the elected invention/species, so that claims 1, 2 and 4 will be examined. Claims 3 and 5-16 have been withdrawn from further consideration as being drawn to a non-elected invention/species. Applicant duly affirms the election and points out to the Examiner that upon allowance of a generic claim, at least dependent claim 3 should be rejoined and allowed also.

The Examiner has objected to the disclosure for the reasons enumerated on page 3, paragraph no. 4 of the present Office Action. Applicant has reviewed the specification and has made the changes suggested by the Examiner, in addition to further minor editorial corrections as shown in the attached Appendix.

Claims 1, 2 and 4 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. In particular, the Examiner maintains that each of the recitations "turning unit",

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“inverting unit”, “discharge unit” and “transfer unit” lack proper recitation of the structural cooperation with previously defined units.

With respect to independent claim 1, Applicant has amended the claim to recite --means-- instead of each of the present recitations which use the term “unit”. With such an amendment, each of the recitations of claim 1 must be interpreted as a means - plus - function recitation under § 112, sixth paragraph since they use the terms “means for” together with a function without the recitation of any structure. In other words, since the recitations are clearly in means - plus - function form, there is no requirement and in fact they should not recite significant structure. Further, each succeeding recitation does in fact refer back to the previous recitations in terms of acting on the stacked sheets. Accordingly, claim 1 as amended clearly complies with § 112, second paragraph.

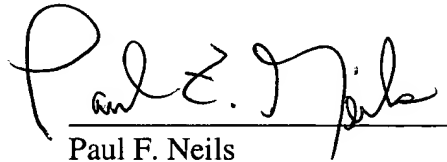
In addition, dependent claims 2 and 3 have been amended in order to be consistent with the terminology in amended claim 1.

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

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The USPTO is directed and authorized to charge all required fees, except for the Issue Fee and the Publication Fee, to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. Please also credit any overpayments to said Deposit Account.

Respectfully submitted,



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PATENT TRADEMARK OFFICE

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APPENDIX
VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

The specification is amended as follows.

Page 2, the fourth full paragraph is amended as follows:

In the mechanism for feeding a stack of sheets, the delivery of sheets should be made reliably. For example, a stack of sheets [need] needs to be fed without being displaced while being fed. It is desirable to feed sheets while giving certain strength to them regardless of their size, and also to hold and feed stacks of sheets reliably even if different numbers of sheets are contained in the stacks.

The paragraph bridging pages 7 and 8 is amended as follows:

The first cutting unit 16 has a pair of support bases 52a, 52b having flat surfaces for holding a stack of films F thereon. The first cutting unit 16 also has a pair of cutters 54a, 54b disposed on a side of the support base [52a] 52b for cutting off two adjacent corners of the films [M] F into arcuate corners. A notching blade 56 for producing notches in the films [M] F is disposed between the cutters 54a, 54b. The support bases 52a, 52b are laterally spaced from each other by a gap 58 left therebetween, and a bucket 40c is retractably disposed in the gap 58.

Page 8, the first full paragraph is amended as follows:

The second cutting unit 18 has a pair of support bases 60a, 60b having flat surfaces for holding a stack of films F thereon. The second cutting unit 18 also has a pair of cutters 62a, 62b disposed on a side of the support base [60b] 60a for cutting off two adjacent corners of the films [M] F into arcuate corners. The support bases 60a, 60b are laterally spaced from each other by a gap 64 left therebetween, and a bucket 40d is retractably disposed in the gap 64.

Page 13, the first full paragraph is amended as follows:

As shown in FIG. 6, the inverting unit 22 has a large gear 162 mounted on an upper end of a support column 160 and an inverting motor 166 operatively coupled to the large gear 162 by a small gear 164 meshing with the large gear 162. Opening [care] and closing cylinders 170a, 170b are connected to the large gear 162 by respective upper and lower brackets 168a, 168b. The upper and lower sandwiching plates 70a, 70b are coupled respectively to the opening and closing cylinders 170a, 170b. The upper and lower sandwiching plates 70a, 70b have comb-toothed fingers 172a - 172f and 174a - 174f for holding films [M] F, which can pass through grooves between the comb-toothed fingers 143a - 143h of the transfer tables 66a, 66b of the first transfer unit 20.

The paragraph bridging pages 13 and 14 is amended as follows:

As shown in FIG. 7, the turning unit 24 basically comprises an upper turning mechanism 176 and a lower turning mechanism 178. The upper turning mechanism 176 comprises a bearing 180 (see FIG. [2] 4) mounted downwardly on a central portion of the beam 122, a turning motor 182a fixedly mounted on the bearing 180, a gear 186a supported by the bearing 180 and held in mesh with a gear 184a of the turning motor 182a, a turntable 188 coupled to a shaft of the gear 186a, an opening and closing cylinder 190 fixed to a lower surface of the turntable 188, and the sandwiching plate 72a that is secured to piston rods 192 of the opening and closing cylinder 190. Guide bars 194a, 194b are vertically disposed between the turntable 188 and the sandwiching plate 72a.

Page 16, the second full paragraph is amended as follows:

When the bucket 40a with the films F placed thereon [are]is moved to a position above the aligning unit 14, the lifting and lowering cylinder 88 of the film transfer mechanism 38 is actuated again to lower the bucket 40a. As a result, the films F are placed onto the support bases 44a, 44b of the aligning unit 14. Then, the front, rear, left, and right edges of the films F are aligned by the aligning plate 46 and the aligning plates 48a, 48b. The bucket 40a from which the films F have been placed onto the support bases 44a, 44b returns to a position for moving a next stack of films F in the supply unit 12 when the drive table 86 is displaced in a direction opposite to the feed direction.

IN THE CLAIMS:

The claims are amended as follows:

1. (Amended) An apparatus for manufacturing a plurality of sheets by stacking and feeding the sheets, comprising:

[a supply unit] means for supplying stacked sheets;

[a turning unit] means for turning the stacked sheets in a plane thereof;

[an inverting unit] means for vertically inverting the stacked sheets;

[a discharge unit] means for discharging the stacked sheets; and

[a transfer unit] means for transferring the stacked sheets to at least one of said turning [unit] means, said inverting [unit] means, [or] and said discharge [unit] means.

2. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

a cutting unit disposed between said supply [unit] means and said turning [unit] means,
for cutting off corners of said sheets.

3. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said turning [unit] means and said discharge [unit] means are combined in an unitary structure.

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IN THE ABSTRACT:

The Abstract of the Disclosure is amended as follows:

Sheets held by a sheet transfer mechanism are supplied from a supply unit to an aligning unit, and aligned with each other by the aligning unit. Thereafter, corners of the sheets are cut off by first and second cutting units, and then the sheets are vertically inverted by an inverting unit. Then, the sheets are turned [into] in a given direction by a turning unit, and supplied to a discharge unit, from which the sheets are discharged.